

10,000 Manhours Will Be Spent Before City's Organ Will Be Heard

SAN GABRIEL—By the time the first concert is given on the city's giant American theater organ some time in early 1970 nearly 10,000 manhours of work will have been spent to restore it.

This is the estimate of Neal Kissel, 1225 S. Benito Ave., Alhambra, in charge of 35 volunteer members of the Los Angeles chapter of the American Theater Organ Enthusiasts working to restore it.

The members, working on weekends and evenings, will have to check and replace where necessary the valves and magnets in 1,150 pipes, ranging in size from the size of a pencil to a height of 16 feet.

Happy With Organ

Thousands of feet of electrical wiring will have to be checked and 30 major components, including the console, piano, pipe chest and electrical contacts will have to be rebuilt, Kissel said.

But despite that, Kissel and the other organ enthusiasts are happy about the instrument.

"It is actually in better shape than what I had anticipated," he said. "But

we are not going to skimp because of that. We intend to go over the whole thing and restore it to mint condition."

He said that once restored the organ will, with proper maintenance, be good for up to 50 years.

The American theater organ, fast disappearing, supplied accompaniment to what happened on the screen in the time of the silent movies.

They made noises like trains, imitated the battering of surf, the pounding of horses' hooves, boat whistles, car horns, bird's songs and crockery crashes and even played music.

\$9,000 Appropriated

City Council authorized expenditure of up to \$9,000 to dismantle, ship and restore the present organ from the RKO Albee Theater in Brooklyn. The theater was torn down and the owners, the Glen Alden Corp., offered it as a gift to any civic organization on condition it be restored and maintained.

Kissel said about \$3,000 was spent on dismantling and transporting the organ here and another \$1,000 has been spent to buy

one set of pipes. The organ has 16 sets.

"The rest of the expense should only involve small parts," he said.

The organ was built in 1925 at a cost of \$25,700 but a similar one would cost \$125,000 if it were to be built today, Kissel said.

"The copper wiring in it alone is worth \$16,000 at today's prices," he said.

The parts are now scattered in a warehouse near the San Gabriel Civic Auditorium, where it will be installed. A small organ now in the auditorium will be sold, city officials said.

Three in Area

Kissel said earlier there are only three of the theater organs left in the Los Angeles area. They are in the Wiltern Theater in Los Angeles, the Rialto Theater in South Pasadena and the Crown Theater in Pasadena.

Only at the Wiltern Theater are occasional concerts given.

The group has been given until January, 1970, by City Council to complete restoration and installation of the organ.

Once installed Kissel believes the organ will pay for itself through concerts.



NOTEWORTHY NOSTALGIA—Michael L. Falabrino, left, San Gabriel mayor, and Neal Kissel examine sections of 1925 theater organ acquired from RKO Albee Theater in Brooklyn by the city and undergoing complete renewal before installation at Civic Auditorium. Kissel has charge of the volunteer restorers.